

Needed Research in Education

THESE ARE troubled times, and this may account for the increasing flood of criticism directed at the schools and school people, at the curriculum and curricular practices. Many of the critics and their criticisms seem to be so reactionary and presumptive that professional leaders need to explore ways of developing public confidence and mutual understanding.

Unfriendly lay critics, however, are not the only ones who are dissatisfied with the educational status quo. Persons possessed of high professional competence in education are also realistically concerned with the serious social consequences of the educational lag, and convinced of the urgent need for forward adjustments. If schools are to have a vital role in the orientation of a rising generation that is realistically concerned with hopes of a better world, the values that should give direction to the curriculum should become criteria for diagnostic evaluation, for sound criticism, for defense and for constructive advance. This calls for creative research in the development of value-centered evaluation procedures.

These are times of rapid social change, and this may well account for the prevalence of dissatisfaction with educational precedents and premises on the part of serious critics who are struck with the anachronisms which define the persisting patterns of traditional school practice. New conditions may well need to be met with new educational procedures. New resources which are eagerly

exploited for profit may well have promising possibilities for instructional uses in schools, but this calls for non-commercial experimentation in which new resources are submitted to tested use in disinterested inquiry.

In education, as in medicine, the courage and disposition to explore and develop ever better solutions for persistent problems need to be fostered and respected, lest these qualities be stifled by the kind of shoddy treatment which has sought to make anything new and everything progressive in education seem ludicrous or preposterous or subversive. Why, indeed, should education stand still when the frontiers of knowledge are being extended and the rate of social change is increasing? What is so silly or dangerous or wrong about progress in education, in view of attitudes toward progress in other fields of endeavor? Can research explain and resolve the inertia and ultra-conservatism which block education's advance?

Implications from Social Sciences

These are times in which the basic social sciences are yielding significant new findings, many of which reinforce each other in ways which have clear implications for education. Sociologists and anthropologists join pediatricians, psychologists and psychiatrists in their concern for human relations conducive to the mental health of infants and young children, and in their emphasis on the significance of an equable emotional climate in homes and schools.

Studies of child development and guidance emphasize the scope of individual differences within age groups and stress the serious and lasting effects of anxiety and pressure for conformity with age or grade norms. Clinicians bring together all the data from case histories to study correlation of such variables as school failure, health, social background and early nurture. They compare parallel arrays of case studies, matching delinquents with non-delinquents in a long-term, cumulative quest for the prevention of anti-social tendencies. All these matters are challenges to curricular adjustments, but implications for changes in school programs, guidance and instruction need to be worked out and tried out in action research if they are to have fruitful bearings on education.

It needs to be recognized that many widely prevalent practices in American schools today were originally patterned after European models; that many of the premises and assumptions on which practices were based in those pre-scientific days are no longer tenable; that cultural differences and social changes which have altered the American prospect and outlook make tradition a hazardous basis for educational policy in times like ours; that youth cannot be oriented to the realities and challenges of today without curricular experiences that put the past in true perspective and reveal the dynamics of social change as the true meaning of history. What Stuart Chase calls "The Proper Study of Mankind" calls for an integrative, inquiring, social approach.

Education has too long been concerned with milling minds through lessons and textbook formulations that lack life-related bearings; with purveying verbal knowledge piecemeal, without the illuminating relationships that give facts meaning and worth for fu-

ture reference; with fixing habits and skills instead of developing resources for flexible life adjustments. It is in these matters that education should become aware of its need for basic reorientation. It is with reference to these matters that communities need to reconceive their relations to schools and their judgment of them. Intelligent citizens should discountenance reactionary pressure. They should criticize schools that are derelict in their social and professional responsibilities. An anachronistic, inert school that submits to reactionary expectations is as bad for a community and its youth as a children's hospital would be, if it were to persist in milling patients through traditional routines at the behest of patrons, without projecting its practices in accord with acknowledged medical advances, or without letting the professional competence of its personnel contribute to its regimen and to the health outlook of its clientele.

Challenge to Inquiry

All these observations have bearings on the professional preparation of school personnel and on the continuing education of teachers in service. There is urgent need for cooperative planning and research in which the needs and problems of schools and school systems, and the resources of institutions concerned with teacher education are coordinated. So much of what still passes for teacher education is in fact anachronistic formal training that complicates field adjustments and growth in service. So much that is projected as a basis for further growth in service never bears fruit.

Research needs to uncover the real causes for blighted and abandoned professional aspirations, for regressive practices and lagging field leadership. Com-

parative studies might reveal factors which make the difference between prospects of professional fulfillment and frustrations, between situations that foster or block in-service growth, morale and aspiration. Such research calls for disinterested sponsorship and for a cooperative approach in which the conditions and the factors under inquiry are not limited to one local situation. State or regional leadership organizations could render a significant service by participating in such a study, projected and coordinated on a national basis.

In many of the categories of educational inquiry there is need for the creative design and validation of new types of research, but vital research is not a routine exercise in the application of techniques to problems. It does not be-

gin with the collection or selection of techniques until it has accepted the challenge to inquiry which sets the problem. It goes as far as it can to solve the problem and submits its findings for review even when they are inconclusive—so that others may be challenged to go on, to develop and validate techniques and procedures if need be. Challenge to inquiry may arise variously and may be faced by individuals or by groups. Only when concern for the solution of a problem is shared does research become cooperative. Education is a field in which shared concern may well be expected to lead to cooperative research on problems that are vital and urgent.—*Laura Zirbes*, professor of education, Ohio State University, Columbus.

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